

Two education agencies to become one next month

■ Certification board will merge with the TEA

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AUSTIN — A single agency again will oversee all aspects of public education in Texas after the State Board for Educator Certification merges with the Texas Education Agency next month.

The certification board was created in 1995 to oversee teacher-preparation programs, develop and administer certification exams and investigate and prosecute disciplinary complaints. The TEA had previously handled those duties.

The Legislature passed a bill this spring directing the TEA to handle the board's administrative functions after Sept. 1.

Most certification board employees will join the TEA's new Educator Quality and P-16 Initiatives Department, Education Commissioner Shirley Neeley said Thursday. Associate Commissioner Patricia Hayes will oversee the division.

The certification agency's 14-member board will retain its authority to make rules on how people become teachers and how educators can be disciplined for a variety of infractions. The rules must still be ap-

proved by the State Board of Education.

The 11 voting members of the certification board are appointed by the governor and in-

clude four teachers, two administrators, one counselor, and four public members. Nonvoting members include a dean of a college of education, a TEA employee and a Higher Education Coordinating Board employee.

The Legislature, meeting in a special session, is considering still more changes in the education bureaucracy.

The Senate's education-spending bill would abolish the certification board and create two panels of educators within the TEA, one to approve disciplinary actions proposed by Neeley, and another to recommend teacher preparation and certification standards to the education commissioner.

That bill has little chance of being passed by the House with just eight days left in the special session.

Brock Gregg, a lobbyist with the Association of Texas Professional Educators, said lawmakers shouldn't deny teachers the ability to govern themselves.

"Education is a profession, and it needs to be treated as

such and that's what we're trying to uphold here," Gregg said.

The certification agency has struggled to keep up with its workload since its creation. In recent years, teachers have complained about backlogs in processing credentials and investigating disciplinary complaints.

A 2002 report by the Sunset Advisory Commission, which periodically reviews whether state agencies are still needed, said teachers lacked confidence in the disciplinary process because the agency's procedures for investigating violations were incomplete.

Funding and staffing issues are part of the problem. The agency had a \$17.5 million budget and a handful of investigators and attorneys to handle more than 1,100 disciplinary complaints in the 2004 fiscal year.

Board member Adele Quintana, a high school biology teacher in Dumas, said she and her fellow board members will work closely with the TEA to ensure a smooth transition.

"If they dissolve our board, I will be really disappointed because I think we serve a very important function," Quintana said. "We have representatives from all groups that I think provide valuable input into the rule-making process."